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ABSTRACT

This study examines Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA) program operations related to school desegregation in New York and New Jersey. Included are brief discussions of application submission, grant competition, and project monitoring and technical assistance. Information presented is based on Federal and State data, program records, interviews, and case studies of eight Basic and Pilot projects in seven districts for 1976-77. The study found that despite successful efforts by the Office of Education to direct the larger ESAA awards to school districts with greater desegregation needs, this region as a whole had a low need for desegregation aid, since little recent desegregation had taken place. In terms of grant size, Region II was found to be receiving large sums of money, despite the modest nature and extent of desegregation plans and the predominance of compensatory education activities not closely related to school desegregation needs. Further, review panels rated magnet school projects very highly, although the applicability of and local support for such projects was questionable. Regarding funding, delays by the Office of Civil Rights and the Office of Education were discovered to have caused numerous implementation delays in Region II projects. Little reliable information was found regarding technical assistance and monitoring. (Author/GC)

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EVALUATION STUDY
Executive Summary

The ESAA Basic and Pilot Programs in Region II

August, 1979

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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One of the largest components of the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA) is the Basic Grants program, which provides funds to local school districts to meet needs related to school desegregation. The ESAA Pilot Program--which was repealed by the Congress effective Fall 1979--has provided aid for children who remain in racially isolated schools even after a desegregation plan has been implemented. Awards for both ESAA programs were made annually with districts within each State competing for available funds. Awards were made on the basis of numerical scores of the quality of the application as determined by a non-federal review panel and a statistical measure of district need for desegregation aid.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to examine the ESAA Basic and Pilot program operations in the U.S. Office of Education Region II which serves New York and New Jersey. The study examines the following aspects of ESAA program operations: application submission, grant competition, and project monitoring and technical assistance.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on available federal and state data, ESAA program records, interviews with Washington and Regional Office staff and non-federal review panel members, and interviews with school district staff and local ESAA Advisory Committee members. Case studies were conducted of eight ESAA Basic and Pilot projects in seven school districts.

The study covers Fiscal Year 1977 grant competition and the implementation of projects funded in Fiscal Year 1976.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings are based on a study of only one regional office. They may or may not be typical of other regional offices or of the centrally administered ESAA program now in operation. Studies such as this are more useful in identifying possible issues and problems rather than making generalizations.

The study found that despite successful efforts by the Office of Education to direct the larger ESAA Basic awards in Region II to school districts with greater desegregation needs, the Region as a whole had a low need for desegregation aid.

Need for desegregation aid

There is not a great deal of recent desegregation in Region II. Half of the school districts applying for and receiving ESAA funds had desegregation plans that were a decade or more old. There was no evidence that there are districts with substantial desegregation needs in Region II that do not apply for ESAA. Only one district with a recent desegregation plan was not successful in the Basic Grant competition. This district was, however, funded with ESAA Special Projects Funds.

These findings suggest that increased targeting of ESAA funds on recently desegregated school districts--which will be required starting in Fiscal Year 1980--can have only a modest impact in Region II. Successful targeting requires either needy districts within Region II that are being inadequately funded or the reallocation of Region II funds to other regions with greater desegregation needs. The former is not plausible; the next section shows that with good targeting of ESAA funds to recently desegregated districts in Region II, these awards still seem too high. ESAA Basic funds are allocated among States by a formula that measures the relative numbers of minority children. Excess funds may be reallocated to other States. [However, other studies show that other regions do not have greater desegregation needs than Region II. In Fiscal Year 1977 Basic funds were reallocated out of Region II. This reallocation presumably improved the targeting of ESAA funds in Region II but resulted in inferior targeting in the receiving regions.]

Other funding issues

Grant size. There was some targeting of the larger ESAA Basic awards in Region II on districts with greater desegregation needs. There were also large reductions in project budgets resulting from the U.S. Office of Education budget review. The resulting Basic grants awarded were still very large given the modest nature and extent of Region II desegregation plans. Three Region II districts that experienced very little desegregation, as measured by the ESAA program, received grants in excess of $1 million. The largest Region II Basic grant--$2.7 million--was awarded to the magnet school project discussed above that proposed to attract 29 to 38 non-minority children to attend the magnet school sites.

Activities. Many of the activities funded by ESAA in Region II are primarily compensatory education in nature and not closely related to school desegregation needs. While these compensatory education activities are authorized under the Act, their relationship to desegregation is vague both to outside evaluator and to local school district personnel.

Application technical assistance. Local application developers often view federal technical assistance sessions as essential to the packaging but not the substance of ESAA applications. Key words and phrases that could be used in the applications to justify the need for an ESAA project could be determined at these sessions.

Magnet schools. Review panels that rated the quality of ESAA applications in Region II gave very high scores to projects proposing magnet schools. These scores were questionable given the high minority enrollment in the district and the absence of district financial support of the magnet schools. Region II magnet school projects funded by the ESAA Basic program promised to reduce the isolation of no more than a handful of minority pupils. Two of the magnet school projects funded in FY 77 had proved unable to recruit pupils to magnet sites in FY 76. Another funded magnet school proposed to increase white pupil enrollment in magnet school sites by only about 2 percent (from 29 to 38 children).

Need vs. quality scores. The FY 77 Basic awards in Region II were in effect determined by quality scores and not measures of need. All Basic applicant districts that had minimally acceptable quality scores and passed a review by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) received awards. The need scores simply determined the rank order in which they were funded.

Funding delays. There were substantial funding delays in Region II attributable to delays by OCR and the OE grants and procurement office. These delays caused many awards to be made in August and September just at the start of the school year. Late funding caused numerous implementation problems:

- o projects were unable to recruit staff with special training or experience. Projects were delayed while the districts wrote job descriptions and reviewed available candidates, or positions were filled by district staff who were not qualified for the project;

- o projects were unable to recruit pupils for project classes. Pupil recruitment problems were more severe in first year magnet school projects which attempted to convince parents to transfer their children from one school to another after the beginning of the school year; and

- o projects did not receive key material until the end of the project year. Staff were forced to borrow materials from other non-ESAA teachers or to use their own resources to obtain needed materials.

Office for Civil Rights reviews

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) determines whether applicant districts have eligible desegregation plans and meet other civil rights compliance requirements of ESAA. The study finds that ESAA funds serve as an incentive for districts to correct problems in order to be eligible for an ESAA award. In FY 77, 14 Basic applicants and 9 Pilot applicants were willing to reassign teachers and to provide additional bilingual services in order to come into compliance with ESAA civil rights eligibility standards.

Monitoring and technical assistance

There was little reliable information available describing the funded project to serve as a basis for monitoring. In order to monitor ESAA projects, ESAA program officers need access to accurate information describing project components and participants. Yet neither the project scope of work nor budget identified the schools participating in each ESAA project, or top staff or resources provided by ESAA. Similarily, neither monthly progress reports nor site visit monitoring were designed to capture such information.

Technical assistance provided is generally procedural in nature related to ESAA administration. Districts likely to have implementation problems (such as those with their first ESAA award) do not receive any special attention from ESAA program officers. Regardless of the difficulties encountered in project implementation, districts receive technical assistance only if requested.

REFERENCES

L. Ferrara and S. Lanoff. The ESAA Basic and Pilot Programs in Region II, 2 volumes. Washington, DC: Applied Urbanetics Inc., 1978.